

HABAKKUK'S CALL TO FAITH IN GOD'S ESCHATOLOGICAL DELIVERANCE

by
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Introduction

Many recognize that Habakkuk 2:4b is the center of Habakkuk's theology.² What is debated is the precise meaning of Habakkuk's key statement and whether the NT authors use this passage in a manner consistent with its original context. The purpose of this article is to briefly outline the message of the book of Habakkuk with a special emphasis on the book's central message to bolster the argument of others who contend that the NT uses Habakkuk consistent with its original meaning.³ This article's thesis is that Habakkuk's main point, found in Habakkuk 2:4b, is that those who persevere in trusting in God's

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²See, e.g., Carl E. Armerding, "Habakkuk," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 607; Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 206; Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 194; Walter E. Rast, "Habakkuk and Justification by Faith," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 10 (June 1983): 169; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 414; Mária Eszenyei Széles, *Wrath and Mercy: A Commentary on the Books of Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 30; Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: A Canonical and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 842; Ernst R. Wendland, "'The Righteous Live by Their Faith' in a Holy God: Complementary Compositional Forces and Habakkuk's Dialogue with the Lord," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (December 1999): 591–628.

³This paper will assume that the goal of biblical hermeneutics is to find the univocal meaning intended by the human/divine author through the grammatical-historical method. Furthermore, the inspiration of Scripture will be assumed and therefore it will be expected that all of Scripture will agree with itself. Without changing the meaning of an earlier passage, a later biblical writer may rightly find a new application or implication of an earlier passage. For this distinction between meaning and significance/application/implication see esp. E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 11–13. Finally, this paper will take a diachronic approach by seeking to understand Old Testament (OT) passages in light of antecedent revelation before moving to later revelation in the OT or NT. See, e.g., Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 190.

promised eschatological deliverance will be considered by him righteous and receive eternal life. The NT writers use Habakkuk 2:4b to make the same point.

This article will proceed in three steps to demonstrate this thesis. First, I will examine the historical and literary context of Habakkuk. To be economic, an overview of Habakkuk's message will be woven into a literary analysis of Habakkuk with a grammatical and lexical analysis limited to key points. Second, because of the importance of Habakkuk 2:4, I will examine the verse and its immediate context more closely before moving to a brief consideration of its NT use. Third, I will end the project with some theological conclusions from Habakkuk, which demonstrate its continuity with the NT passages which cite it.

Historical and Literary Context of Habakkuk

Authorship and Date

The book claims to be the “oracle” (נִצְוָה) received by Habakkuk (1:1) and his “prayer” (תְּפִלָּה; 3:1).⁴ Other than his name, we do not know anything else about Habakkuk. He appears in the apocryphal *Bel and the Dragon*, where he is identified as a Levite, and rabbinical literature identified him with the son of the Shunamite in 2 Kings 4, but there is no evidence to support either of these identifications. These types of legends likely became attached to Habakkuk during the intertestamental period precisely because nothing was known about him.⁵

⁴The noun נִצְוָה has been variously translated here as “oracle” (ESV, NASB95, NRSV, NIV84), “prophecy,” (NIV), “pronouncement” (CSB), “burden” (KJV, NKJV), and “message” (NET, NLT). The variety of translations represents the lack of consensus regarding the word's meaning. See, e.g., the literature cited by Mark J. Boda, “Freeing the Burden of Prophecy: Mašša’ and the Legitimacy of Prophecy in Zech 9–14,” *Biblica* 87 (2006): 338–57. In this particular context, the lexicons suggest the glosses of “pronouncement” (*HALOT*, s.v. “נִצְוָה,” 639) or “utterance, speech” (*DCH*, s.v. “נִצְוָה,” 498). However, the word was also used for a “burden” or “load” literal (see, e.g., Exod 23:5) or metaphorical (Ps 38:4 [38:5 MT]). The metaphorical use of “burden” may be being applied to the prophetic oracle, i.e., “The picture is of the Lord's message which often consists of a collection of individual sayings, as a concrete burden that a prophetic or scribal porter transports and delivers to its audience” (Pamela J. Scalise, “Zechariah,” in *Minor Prophets II*, New International Biblical Commentary [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009], 272). A final decision is not necessary for this paper's thesis but it is possible that the word here indicates an eschatological prophecy (e.g., Zech 9:1; 12:1; Isa 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; etc.). See Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 241.

⁵Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 463–64. The connection with 2 Kgs 4 was prompted by the similarity between Habakkuk's name, which has an obscure meaning, and the Hebrew verb חָבַק (“to embrace”) used in 2 Kgs 4:16. However, it is not certain that the prophet's name derived from this verb. More recently it has been suggested that his name derived from an Akkadian term for a garden plant. See, e.g., Richard S. Hess, *The Old Testament: A Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 666.

Habakkuk's prophecy and prayer are not dated, so a tentative date can only be arrived at by examining the book's content.⁶ Several factors in the book point to a date during the reign of Judah's Jehoiakim (609–598 B.C.),⁷ specifically between 609–605 B.C.⁸ First, God presents the coming of the “raising up” of “the Chaldeans”⁹ as something

⁶This paper will assume the unity of the book of Habakkuk and assume that it was composed over a relatively short time by the prophet Habakkuk (contra, e.g., J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, Old Testament Library [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991], 83–84). Roberts suggests that passages such as 1:11–17 and 2:6–19 require the writer to have experienced Chaldean oppression, but if one accepts the possibility of a predictive prophecy this conclusion is not necessary. Critical scholarship has been willing to date the composition of portions of Habakkuk as late as the Maccabean period. See, e.g., William Hayes Ward, *Habakkuk*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1911), 6. The third chapter is not found in the Qumran commentary on Habakkuk (1QpHab), but its absence is an argument from silence, and the third chapter, while distinct in genre, shows a unity in subject matter, theme, and vocabulary with the first two chapters. See, e.g., Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 420–22; Richard D. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies, 2003), 119–21. For a detailed defense of the book's cohesion see esp. Wendland, “The Righteous Live by Their Faith’ in a Holy God,” 612–28.

⁷For the dating used in this paper see Andrew Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2011). A date during Jehoiakim's reign is the majority position. See, e.g., D. Waylon Bailey, “Habakkuk,” in *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker and D. Waylon Bailey, New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 1999), 260; David W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 44; Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 433; Feinberg, *Minor Prophets*, 205; Robert D. Haak, *Habakkuk*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 44 (New York: Brill, 1992), 132–33; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 931–32; Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, 3–4.

Whitekettle has recently argued that the simile in 1:14b likely points to a date when Judah no longer has a king (i.e., post-586 B.C.) (Richard Whitekettle, “How the Sheep of Judah Became Fish: Habakkuk 1,14 and the Davidic Monarchy,” *Biblica* 96 [2015]: 273–81). However, this intriguing argument not only is difficult to reconcile with 1:5, but it also too readily rules out the likelihood that Habakkuk is speaking of future actions in 1:14–15.

⁸Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 396; F. F. Bruce, “Habakkuk,” in *The Minor Prophets*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 2:834; Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti, *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 465–66; Eduard Nielsen, “The Righteous and the Wicked in Habaquq,” *Studia Theologica* 6 (1952): 54–78; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 37; Conrad von Orelli, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 241–42.

⁹Unless otherwise noted all English Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) (LaHabra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995).

The חֲבֻכּוּדִים were the people who ruled over Babylon beginning in the seventh century B.C. (*HALOT*, s.v. “חֲבֻכּוּדִים,” 502). This article will refer to these people, the Chaldean or Neo-Babylonian empire begun by Nabopolassar, as *Babylonians* for convenience.

that will astonish Habakkuk and his contemporaries (Hab 1:5–6). This surprise, one of many elements in the book which would prove challenging to believe, must refer to a time before the Babylonians defeated Egypt in 605 B.C. because, at that point, Babylon's hegemony over the ancient Near East (ANE) was clear. However, it seems unlikely that the Babylonians would have been referred to as an independent power before 626/625 B.C., when Babylon gained independence from Assyria.

Second, Habakkuk receives this oracle at a time when “the law is ignored and justice is never upheld” and “the wicked surround the righteous” (1:4). Some have suggested an earlier date during Josiah's reign (641–609 B.C.) primarily because Habakkuk's language of amazement and wonder (1:5) best fits the time before Babylon's independence.¹⁰ However, if 1:4 refers to wickedness inside Judah,¹¹ the occasion of 1:4 best fits the reign of the rebellious Jehoiakim (2 Chr 36:5, 8) rather than that of his righteous father Josiah (2 Chr 34:2).

Third, Habakkuk 1:5 points to the coming of the Babylonians “in your days” (בְּיָמֶיךָ), which makes it more difficult to place the date earlier into the days of the wicked Manasseh.¹² Furthermore, God promised Josiah in 2 Kings 22:20 that the coming disaster would not occur during his lifetime. Therefore, the conditions of Habakkuk 1:4 and the prediction of Habakkuk 1:5 are best understood against the backdrop of Jehoiakim's early years on the throne. This conclusion must be held cautiously since this book does not contain an explicit date as do others of the Twelve prophets (e.g., Zeph 1:1). One possibility for the lack of specification regarding the historical context is that the book was intended to retain a timelessness that spoke to a variety of situations.¹³

Historical Setting, Occasion, and Purpose

Several factors support the identification of the “wicked” in 1:4 with the unrighteous majority in Judah.¹⁴ First, Habakkuk's

¹⁰Theodore Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: The Minor Prophets* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1956), 316; E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 168. Eissfeldt argues for this same period because he does not believe 1:5 allows for a date before the fall of Nineveh to Babylon in 612 B.C. Eissfeldt, *Old Testament*, 422. So also Kaiser, *Promise-Plan of God*, 194.

¹¹As we will see in the next section, the identity of the “wicked” in 1:4 is debated, but this article will defend the view that they are the unrighteous in Judah.

¹²Jewish tradition placed Habakkuk during the reign of Manasseh (697–643 B.C.), and this date has been defended by a minority of writers. See, e.g., C. F. Keil, “Habakkuk,” in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 10:388–89; Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 109–10. This view seeks to avoid the difficulty of having rampant wickedness present during the reign of Josiah.

¹³Philip Whitehead, “Habakkuk and the Problem of Suffering: Theodicy Deferred,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 10 (2016): 265–67.

¹⁴So, e.g., Armerding, “Habakkuk,” 610; Bailey, “Habakkuk,” 298; Baker,

description of them in 1:3 matches Jeremiah's description of Judah during the early parts of Jehoiakim's reign (Jer 6:7).¹⁵ Second, the תורה which has been ignored (1:4) is best understood as the Mosaic Law.¹⁶ Third, the language of 1:2–4 points to social injustice inside the nation rather than a foreign power's oppression. For example, the term "violence" (חַמַּס) appears six times in this small book (1:2–3, 9; 2:8, 17a, 17b) beginning with Habakkuk's opening complaint regarding the "wicked." The term חַמַּס is used for extreme wickedness, and not necessarily physical violence, and might be better translated "injustice."¹⁷ The collocation of חַמַּס with שָׁח, "destruction," (1:3) was used in Amos 3:10 to describe internal corruption within Israel and will later be similarly utilized in Ezekiel 45:8.¹⁸ The collocation of יָסוּר ("iniquity") and עָוֶן ("wickedness") in verse 4 is also frequently used in earlier OT book to describe social injustice.¹⁹ Balaam's vision saw these two characteristics, יָסוּר and עָוֶן, absent from Israel with God as their king (Num 23:21), but now they have become prevalent in Judah because of her unfaithfulness to the Mosaic covenant.

If we attempt to adopt Habakkuk's viewpoint, it is easier to understand his frustration. In a very short time, he likely has seen the death of righteous Josiah in a battle against the Egyptians (2 Chr 35:22–24; the first time a Davidide had fallen in battle with a foreign power). Also, he has seen Josiah's successor Jehoahaz carried off by Egypt after reigning only three months (2 Chr 36:2–4), and then the reign of evil Jehoiakim who overturned the reforms of his father (2 Chr 36:5, 8).

When considering purpose, the book of Habakkuk is commonly

Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, 46; Robert B. Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 185; Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 99; Whitehead, "Habakkuk and the Problem of Suffering," 266. Contra, e.g., Sweeney who sees the "wicked" as the Babylonians throughout the book. Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 2:455. And contra, e.g., George Smith who represents an older view which saw the "wicked" in 1:1–4 as the Assyrians. George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, rev. ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), 2:115–24.

¹⁵William L. Holladay, "Plausible Circumstances for the Prophecy of Habakkuk," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 (2001): 125.

¹⁶Armerding, "Habakkuk," 612; Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, 318; Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 133.

¹⁷TWOT, s.v. "חַמַּס," 297; see also Whitehead, "Habakkuk and the Problem of Suffering," 269. This does not mean that there was not some physical violence taking place which grieved Habakkuk. E.g., as Bailey notes, Jehoiakim was the first king of Judah who is specifically said to have killed a prophet of God (Jer 26:20–23). Bailey, "Habakkuk," 297. However, חַמַּס covers a wider range of injustices than our word *violence*.

¹⁸Whitehead, "Habakkuk and the Problem of Suffering," 266.

¹⁹Armerding, "Habakkuk," 611.

labeled a theodicy. Still, as Whitehead emphasizes, it is not a theodicy in the traditional sense, as it does not struggle with questions involving the presence of evil and God's justice.²⁰ As Achtemeier observes,

Its principal question is not, Why does God reward the wicked and punish the righteous? In that sense, Habakkuk is not a theodicy, a justification of the ways of God to human beings. It is taken for granted in the book that God is just (1:13); and indeed, Israel's Mosaic covenant faith in Yahweh, Lord of heaven and earth, is presupposed throughout the book.²¹

Habakkuk's concern is that God has not acted sooner.²² Based on earlier OT revelation, the book presupposes the presence of evil and a righteous standard by which evil is identified. Based on his awareness of God's justice and society's wickedness, Habakkuk longs to see God punish the wicked. The Law given at Sinai reflects God's character and a delay in judgment for covenant unfaithfulness calls into question God's justice. However, God reveals to Habakkuk that the wicked will eventually be punished (2:6–20). When the wicked are finally brought to their end, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (2:14). Delayed judgment does not diminish God's glory, but, in a manner inscrutable to man, delayed judgment will magnify God's glory. Therefore, Habakkuk writes the book to encourage the righteous to persevere in trusting that their powerful, sovereign God will someday act to make everything right.

Literary Structure and Literary Context

"How the Book of Habakkuk is read and understood is dependent in large manner on how one views the origin and fundamental organization of the work."²³ Habakkuk has two main sections: (1) chapters 1–2, which are introduced as an "oracle" in 1:1 and contain an alternating conversation between the prophet and God, and (2) chapter 3, which is introduced as a "prayer."²⁴ Some argue for a three-part

²⁰Whitehead, "Habakkuk and the Problem of Suffering," 268. See also Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 31.

²¹Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi*, 31.

²²So also Paul L. Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 302.

²³Rast, "Habakkuk and Justification by Faith," 170.

²⁴Sweeney has the most detailed argument in favor of this two-part structure ("Structure, Genre, and Intent in the Book of Habakkuk," *Vetus Testamentum* 41 [January 1991]: 63–83). For others arguing for a similar two-part structure see, e.g., Francis I. Andersen, *Habakkuk*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 14–15; Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 47–48; Bruce, "Habakkuk," 837; Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 118–19; Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, 7–8. Although Wendland argues for a chiastic structure with 2:1–5 at its center, his divisions are essentially the same as those who propose a more linear two-part structure (Wendland, "'The Righteous Live by Their Faith' in a Holy God," 594).

structure with a major break at some point in chapter 2, but the fact that there is no consensus on where this second unit should begin is perhaps one indication that chapters 1 and 2 should be viewed as a unit.²⁵ Those who argue for a three-part structure commonly point to the shift in 2:6–20 to a taunt, but the taunt containing five woes is part of God's response to Habakkuk and thus is best understood as part of the conversation begun in 1:2.

The first section of the book (1:1–2:20) breaks into four subsections. First, following the superscription in 1:1, Habakkuk addresses God concerning Judah's wickedness (1:2–4). The central theme of this section is justice (צדק occurring 2x in v. 4).²⁶ It seems best to label chapters 1–2 as "complaint" in a forensic sense rather than "lament."²⁷ Second, God responds by predicting the coming of the Babylonians who will appear "like an eagle swooping down to devour" (v. 8) and "sweep through" the land (v. 11) in judgment (1:5–11).²⁸ It is appropriate that this judgment for covenantal unfaithfulness echoes language from Deuteronomy 28:49 ("The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand") which described the

²⁵O'Brien and Robertson both place the break at 2:1 (Julia M. O'Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries [Nashville: Abingdon, 2004], 59; Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 135–248); Roberts places the break at 2:2 (*Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 82); while Bailey, Lund and Walker, and Ward place the break at 2:6 (Bailey, "Habakkuk," 287; Nils Wilhelm Lund and Henry Hammersley Walker, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Habakkuk," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 53 [1934]: 355–70; Ward, *Habakkuk*, 8–28).

²⁶Bailey, "Habakkuk," 295.

²⁷Armerding, "Habakkuk," 606. Armerding points to portions of Job, Jeremiah, and the Psalms (e.g., Ps 12; 73:1–14) as analogous "complaint" literature.

²⁸Although 1:5–11 is not introduced with a formula explicitly indicating that God is the speaker, the content of the speech clearly identifies him as the speaker. So, e.g., Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 139; Whitehead, "Habakkuk and the Problem of Suffering," 269–70. At least two other factors support this conclusion. First, v. 5 begins with a series of four imperatives which suggest a change in speaker. In Hab 1–2 all 11 of the imperatives are found in God's speeches (1:5 [4x]; 2:2 [2x], 3, 16 [2x], 19 [2x]). Second, there is a clear shift from second-person address in vv. 3–4 to first-person speech in v. 5. Michael Floyd argues that all of 1:2–17 represents Habakkuk's speech and is thus not an interaction between Habakkuk and God. The complaint about violence in vv. 2–4 presupposes that the actions described in vv. 5–11, which were part of a revelation previously given to the prophet, are already occurring ("Prophetic Complaints about the Fulfillment of Oracles in Habakkuk 1:2–17 and Jeremiah 15:10–18," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 [1991]: 403–6). Floyd makes two basic points in his argument: (1) 1:2–4, 1:5–11, and 1:12–17 share several key words, and (2) if 1:5–11 is God's reply to 1:2–4, then God does not absolve himself of the charge of injustice, but instead brings his justice further into question. In response to Floyd, (1) the repetition of key words can be explained as a literary device in which the *ipsissima vox* is recorded and key words are repeated for irony, and (2) Floyd's second argument is based on the faulty presupposition that God is obligated to respond to Habakkuk and that what he claims to do in 1:5–11 is unjust.

covenantal curses.²⁹ Deuteronomy 28 is not the only OT passage evoked in this section. In Genesis 22:17, Abraham was promised descendants “as the sand which is on the seashore,” but in Habakkuk 1:9, “the metaphor is turned on its head,” and it is the coming Babylonian horde which will “collect captives like sand.”³⁰ This declaration is likely difficult to believe in Habakkuk’s day because Egypt is the most apparent foreign threat, and Judah, up to this point, has likely only viewed Babylon as an ally. However, as House notes, this was not a new revelation because God had earlier predicted in Isaiah 39 that Babylon would be his instrument of judgment on Judah.³¹ The miracle that occurred in the days of Hezekiah would not be repeated; Jerusalem would fall.

In the third sub-section, despite God’s promise that these Babylonians would “be held guilty” (1:11), Habakkuk questions God a second time (1:12–17). The prophet’s concern is that God is holy and pure; therefore, it seems inconsistent with his character for him to use as his instrument a people more wicked than those he judges in Judah. Habakkuk had complained of injustice in Israel (חֲמָס), but the Babylonians “come for violence” (בָּלֵה לְחָמָס וְבוֹא, 1:9). The key to understanding Habakkuk’s second complaint is the interpretation of his simile in 1:14–15. The simile compares the people of Judah to “fish of the sea” (דְּגֵי הַיָּם) and “creeping things” (רֶמֶשׂ) “without a ruler over them.” This simile is commonly understood as a reference to the vulnerability and the helplessness of Judah’s people in the face of the Babylonian onslaught.³² However, the image may be meant to portray the indiscriminate nature of the judgment, i.e., both wicked and righteous Judeans would suffer.³³ רֶמֶשׂ in the context of aquatic life are best understood as

²⁹Those seeing the connection include Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets*, 187; Feinberg, *Minor Prophets*, 208. It is striking that the same simile is used in Isa 48:19 in the context of Babylon’s future demise. As we will see, Deut 28–33 will continue to form an important background to Habakkuk, as it does for all of the Twelve.

³⁰Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 54.

³¹Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 377. Richard Alan Fuhr and Gary E. Yates point out that the Babylonians appear to be deliberately portrayed in a manner analogous to the Assyrians in the book of Nahum (*The Message of the Twelve: Hearing the Voice of the Minor Prophets* [Nashville: B&H, 2016], 228. This follows from them both being God’s instruments of judgment.

³²So, e.g., Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 184; Bailey, “Habakkuk,” 315; Bruce, “Habakkuk,” 854; John Goldingay, “Habakkuk,” in *Minor Prophets II*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 64; Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 147; Keil, “Habakkuk,” 10:397; Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 162; Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 104; Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 2:486.

³³Fuhr and Yates, *Message of the Twelve*, 229; Richard Whitekettle, “Like a Fish and Shrimp out of Water: Identifying the Dag and Remes Animals of Habakkuk 1:14,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 24 (2014): 491–503.

unclean sea creatures such as shellfish. Whitekettle persuasively argues that the distinction between נָקִי and זָמָר (which also appears in Lev 11:9–12 and Deut 14:9–10) speaks of the difference between the righteous and the wicked in Judah.³⁴ A faithful Jewish fisherman would separate the unclean animals that were caught in his “dragnet” (מַכְמֶרֶת; σαγήνη in LXX, 1:15, 16), but a Gentile would eat them all.³⁵ Therefore, all in Judah would suffer.

In 1:12, Habakkuk referred to God as Israel's Rock (cf. Gen 49:24; esp. Deut 32:4) who had promised life to his people,³⁶ but now Habakkuk is concerned that the righteous will perish along with the wicked in Judah and that the Babylonians will detract from God's glory by worshiping their own military might (1:16; cf. 1:11). This third section (1:12–17) ends with a transitional statement by Habakkuk in which he vows to patiently wait for God's response to this second question (2:1). Habakkuk's statement, “I will stand on my guard post,” is best understood as a metaphor rather than a literal standing watch,³⁷ but it captures the attitude of one who both desires to hear from God and is willing to be “reproved.”³⁸ Although Habakkuk has expressed his concerns to God, he is still eager to see God act and hear God speak.

³⁴Whitekettle, “Like a Fish and Shrimp out of Water,” 502.

³⁵This custom of sorting clean and unclean fish caught in a dragnet (σαγήνη) before eating them can be seen in Matt 13:47–48. So, e.g., Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 207; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 392. Although these writers on Matthew's Gospel do not make a connection with Hab 1:14–15, one wonders if Jesus may have been intentionally alluding to the prophet's simile. Matthew uses not only σαγήνη (as does the LXX in Isa 19:8; Ezek 26:5, 14; 47:10), but also the imagery of clean and unclean fish. If the allusion is intentional, Jesus's point may then have been—although the Babylonians did not discriminate, the final judgment will.

³⁶Several English versions, assuming the first-person prefix in the MT was a later scribal correction, have translated נָמִית לֹא in 1:12 as “you will never die” (so, e.g., NIV, CSB, NRSV, NET). It seems best to follow the MT reading which is also supported by the LXX, Symmachus, and 1QpHab (Armerding, “Habakkuk,” 622; Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 146; contra, e.g., Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 103). As Kaiser notes, the reading “we will not die” forms a natural parallel with God's response in 2:4 (*Promise-Plan of God*, 195–96).

³⁷So, e.g., Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi*, 42; Feinberg, *Minor Prophets*, 211; Keil, “Habakkuk,” 10:366. Contra those who argue that Habakkuk was literally serving as a watchman (e.g., Bailey, “Habakkuk,” 319–20; Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 149). Habakkuk may have adopted this internal disposition of waiting for God to speak at an elevated spot where he routinely went to pray (von Orelli, *Twelve Minor Prophets*, 247). It is also possible that this metaphor was selected because of its use in Isa 21:8 in the context of Babylon's demise.

³⁸The phrase עַל־תּוֹכְחָתִי in 2:1 has been translated “to this complaint” (NIV) or “concerning my complaint” (ESV, NRSV; cf. CSB), but is better rendered “when I am reapproved” (NASB) or “when he counters my argument” (NET). See esp. Floyd, “Prophetic Complaints,” 400.

In the next sub-section, God responds a second time by addressing the wickedness of the Babylonians (2:2–20).³⁹ Justice delayed will not be justice denied. Following an introduction (2:2–5), God responds to Habakkuk's concerns by giving a series of five woe oracles that describe his judgment of Judah's enemy (2:6–20).⁴⁰ These oracles collectively take the form of a taunt song. Specifically, this could be identified as a doom song, a sub-genre of the taunt song, which describes "the demise of a nation before it actually takes place—a kind of obituary for someone still alive."⁴¹ Although the taunt song has sixth-century implications for the coming Babylonians, the judgment described in 2:6–20 seems to transcend what occurred when Babylon fell to the Medo-Persians.⁴² First, several writers have noted that Daniel 8:19 and 11:27 echo Habakkuk 2:3 when speaking of the eschaton.⁴³ Second, an

³⁹Alice Ogden Bellis identifies all of 2:2–20 as God's answer to Habakkuk's second question and as the content of the vision referred to in v. 3 ("Habakkuk 2:4b: Intertextuality and Hermeneutics," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky, SBL Symposium Series 8 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000], 373). However, a switch from two-verse stanzas to three three-verse stanzas at v. 6, the parallel verb forms which begin v. 2 and end v. 5, and the thematic shift in v. 6ff all point to vv. 2–5 being an opening introductory statement by God and vv. 6–20 being the content of the vision (E. Ray Clendenen, "Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness in the Book of Habakkuk?" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 24 [2014]: 506).

⁴⁰For a defense of the view that sees God as the speaker from 2:2–20 see esp. Wendland, "The Righteous Live by Their Faith' in a Holy God," 598–99.

⁴¹Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., "Taunt," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 841–42.

⁴²The Medo-Persian army did not destroy Babylon and their capture of the city was portrayed as a vindication of the Babylonian gods rather than a repudiation of these idols. A convincing case can be made that the prophets often use hyperbolic language and that this might be occurring in the passages involving Babylon's judgment. See, e.g., Homer Heater Jr., "Do the Prophets Teach That Babylonia Will Be Rebuilt in the Eschaton?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (March 1998): 23–43. However, several key passages (e.g., Isa 14; 48; Jer 52) associate a time of peace and prosperity for the reunited tribes of Israel with Babylon's complete collapse. See, e.g., Charles H. Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 (Part 2)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (Oct–Dec 1987): 448. Rev 17–18 pictures a future judgment of "Babylon" which echoes language found in Hab 2. The "Babylon" judged in the sixth-century B.C. was absorbed into a series of world powers that continued to dominate Judah (cf. Dan 2). Babylon was not only the first in this series, but it also had some continuity with the original rebellious government from which it derived its name (Gen 11:1–8). Perhaps it is best to view Hab 2:6–20 as a taunt against this entire transgenerational *zeitgeist*, which may or may not one day be centered again in literal Babylon, but will culminate in a final king who will wage war against God's people. As will be argued in the next section, Hab 3 is best understood also as an eschatological vision of the future New Exodus which will lead to the messianic kingdom. Of course, Habakkuk cannot see from his standpoint that the coming exile will last for centuries as a succession of empires take the place of Babylon. However, this will be revealed a few decades later to his contemporary Daniel (Dan 9:20–27).

⁴³E.g., Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 205; John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 337; Keil, "Habakkuk," 10:400. See also the parallel between Isa 8:16–18; Dan 12:9–13; and Hab 2:2–3.

eschatological fulfillment seems especially evident because 2:14 is a quotation of Isaiah 11:9 and contains language that is frequently part of the prophetic vision of the messianic kingdom.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Qumran commentary on Habakkuk understood the "Chaldeans" of 1:5–11 as the "Kittim," who would be "quick and valiant in war, causing many to perish."⁴⁵ Although we may safely conclude that the Qumran community was wrong in their identification, it is noteworthy that they also found something in the context of Habakkuk that pointed to an eschatological referent beyond sixth-century Babylon and connected it to Balaam's eschatological prophecies (Num 24:24).⁴⁶

The book's second main section (3:1–19) is a "prayer" or תְּפִלָּה, which was "a typical title for psalms of lament which petition God for deliverance" (cf. Pss 86; 90; 102; 142).⁴⁷ This title coupled with the presence of several terms which are assumed to be musical notations (vv. 1, 3, 9, 13, 19) has led most to identify chapter 3 as a psalm.⁴⁸ Verses 1–2 use first-person verbs and are Habakkuk's introduction to the psalm. Verses 16–19 are also in the first person. In between, verses 3–15 use third person verbs and detail God's appearance in judgment.⁴⁹ Despite the use of the perfect tense, this section of the song is best understood as Habakkuk's description of an eschatological new exodus, or regathering and restoration of Israel, using language drawn from God's past mighty deeds.⁵⁰ "The prophet sees the future in the

⁴⁴See esp. Abner Chou, *I Saw the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Vision* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 34, 54, 57, 62. On the eschatological fulfillment of this passage see also Mark A. Hassler, "Isaiah 14 and Habakkuk 2: Two Taunt Songs Against the Same Tyrant?" *The Master's Seminary Journal* 26 (2015): 221–29.

⁴⁵1QpHab 2.10 (Géza Vermès, ed., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, rev. ed. [New York: Penguin, 2004], 510).

⁴⁶Michael B. Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve: The Minor Prophets*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 317–18.

⁴⁷Sweeney, "Structure, Genre, and Intent," 78.

⁴⁸See, e.g., Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 241.

⁴⁹For this literary structure of chap. 3 see esp. Theodore Hiebert, *God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 38 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 59–76. See also Armerding, "Habakkuk," 635; Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 241.

⁵⁰E.g., the "plague" in 3:5 is speaking of a future judgment on this world using language analogous to the plagues in Egypt at the time of the first Exodus. Also, God's future acts are described in 3:8 in language drawn from the crossing of the Red Sea. It is widely recognized that the OT prophets, particularly Isaiah, use elements of the historical Exodus (e.g., liberation from slavery, defeat of Israel's enemy, crossing of the Red Sea, the theophany at Sinai, the wilderness wanderings, the conquest of Canaan, etc.) as a pattern for a future analogous event commonly labeled the new exodus (e.g., Isa 11:11–16). See, e.g., Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 362–68; Stephen Dempster, "Exodus and Biblical Theology: On Moving into the Neighborhood with a New Name," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12 (2008): 4–23. Several writers have recently argued that this motif is the central theme, or at least one of the central themes, in

perfect tense and employs figures of nature as symbols of history.”⁵¹ Shepherd notes that this closing, eschatological poem in Habakkuk 3:1–15 mirrors the similar opening poem in Nahum 1:2–8 providing a bookend around these two portions of the Twelve.⁵² In verses 1–2, Habakkuk asks God to act. After seeing the eschatological theophany described in verses 3–15, Habakkuk responds in faith to his initial complaint, which began the book (1:2–4).⁵³ While various options have been proposed for the contents of the vision that Habakkuk is told to write down in 2:2, the theophany in chapter 3 may be the vision’s content.⁵⁴ In other words, God’s response, in chapter 3 and likely in 2:4, to Habakkuk’s concerns regarding justice is a vision of the eschatological new exodus which will bring an end to Israel’s long exile and put an end to Israel’s enemies.⁵⁵

Scripture (e.g., Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018], 5; Alastair Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018], 13; Eugene H. Merrill, “The Meaning and Significance of the Exodus Event,” in *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture*, ed. Michael Robert Fox [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014], 16). For the importance of the new exodus in the composition of the Twelve prophets see esp. Michael B. Shepherd, “The New Exodus in the Composition of the Twelve,” in *Text and Canon: Essays in Honor of John H. Sailhamer*, ed. Robert L. Cole and Paul J. Kissling (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 120–36. Rather than viewing the death and resurrection of Jesus as the fulfillment of these OT new exodus passages, I understand the new exodus in the OT to be a description of the regathering and restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel which will take place at Christ’s Second Coming (a restoration made possible because of Jesus’s atonement, cf. Deut 32:43). See esp. Neal Cushman, “The Postponement of the New Exodus Theory in Non-Dispensational Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 23 (2019): 84–102. If the new exodus is viewed as the restoration of Israel’s mediatorial kingdom, the motif is closely tied to Scripture’s central theme, i.e., the kingdom of God.

⁵¹Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 143. The use of the perfect here in 3:3–15 is the “prophetic perfect,” “a way of describing something so certain that the prophet could speak of it as already accomplished,” similar to our modern expression “it’s money in the bank.” Bailey, “Habakkuk,” 359. For others who take this section as a prediction of the future see, e.g., Robert B. Chisholm, “A Theology of the Minor Prophets,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 415; Feinberg, *Minor Prophets*, 216; Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve*, 30.

⁵²Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve*, 30–31. Both Nahum and Habakkuk use their poems to describe what will occur in the coming יום צָרָה (Nah 1:7; Hab 3:16). Brevard Childs also points out the parallel between the opening of Nahum and the closing of Habakkuk (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 454).

⁵³Wendland, “‘The Righteous Live by Their Faith’ in a Holy God,” 596.

⁵⁴So, e.g., Bruce, “Habakkuk,” 859; O’Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 116; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 116, 149. Shepherd lists it as a viable possibility (*A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve*, 324). It could be that 3:3–15 is an elaboration of 2:6–20, and both describe the eschatological vision referred to in 2:3. אֲחֻזָּה would normally be something a prophet would see.

⁵⁵Since the later post-exilic prophets still describe both another dispersion and

Habakkuk's placement among the Minor Prophets also seems to point to an eschatological message that will find its fulfillment in the Day of the Lord. In addition to the connection noted above between Nahum and Habakkuk, other suggestions have been made concerning the placement of Habakkuk in the Twelve. Paul House argues that the Twelve have a three-part outline emphasizing Israel's covenantal unfaithfulness, judgment, and future restoration: (1) Hosea–Micah (Sin), (2) Nahum–Zephaniah (Punishment), (3) Haggai–Malachi (Restoration).⁵⁶ Therefore, according to this proposal, Habakkuk would have a pivotal spot in the Twelve's story addressing the certainty of the coming of judgment not only on Judah (as in Zephaniah, which follows it), but also on non-covenant nations (as in Nahum, which precedes it).⁵⁷ "Habakkuk heightens the tension brought about by Nahum," "both Israel and Babylon will be judged...all the earth stands condemned by God."⁵⁸ Many writers have noted these three emphases in the Twelve: (1) sin, (2) judgment culminating in exile, and (3) restoration following judgment.⁵⁹ And many have identified the Day of the Lord as a unifying theme throughout the Twelve.⁶⁰ Shepherd notes that Zephaniah's teaching on the Day of the Lord is introduced with language ("Be silent before the Lord GOD," 1:7) drawn from Habakkuk 2:20 ("Let all the earth be silent before Him").⁶¹ Both Habakkuk's message and its placement in the Twelve point to an eschatological fulfillment of his prophecy.

another regathering (i.e., new exodus) of Israel, the return from Babylon did not fulfill the OT new exodus passages and the partial restoration achieved under Cyrus and lasting till the time of the writing of the NT was only temporary. To this day, Israel remains in a sense still in exile waiting for her restoration. "The prophets universally attest that the return from Babylon under Cyrus was by no means the only example of such a thing. Indeed, they knew of a dispersion far more serious and widespread than anything known in biblical times, a dispersion nonetheless couched in terms of a Babylonian exile (cf. Deut 28:64; 30:1–4; Isa 40–55; Ezek 12:15–16; Mic 4:10)" (Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 108).

⁵⁶Paul R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 97 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 72.

⁵⁷Ibid., 91–92.

⁵⁸Ibid., 145–46.

⁵⁹See, e.g., C. Marvin Pate et al., *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 91.

⁶⁰Craig A. Blasing, "The Day of the Lord: Theme and Pattern in Biblical Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169 (Jan–Mar 2012): 3–19; Paul R. House, "Endings as New Beginnings: Returning to the Lord, the Day of the Lord, and Renewal in the Book of the Twelve," in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Scharf (New York: De Gruyter, 2003), 313–38; James D. Nogalski, "The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve," in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Scharf (New York: De Gruyter, 2003), 192–213.

⁶¹Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve*, 31.

Use of Habakkuk 2:4 in the New Testament

Before considering the use of 2:4 in the NT, it is important to focus closer than was done above on the original, immediate context of 2:4. Debbie Hunn has helpfully identified four key questions regarding 2:4b: (1) Whose *צַדִּיק* is at issue? (2) What is *אֱמוּנָה*? (3) Who is the *צַדִּיק*? and (4) When will the righteous live, i.e., what kind of life is it?⁶²

Whose אֱמוּנָה Is at Issue?

Regarding the first question, the masculine singular suffix on *צַדִּיקוֹ* could refer to (1) the righteous one in 2:4, (2) the vision in 2:3,⁶³ or (3) God the speaker,⁶⁴ an option that is supported by the LXX's *ἐκ πίστεώς μου*. The third option is unlikely, for when God refers to himself in the third person in the OT, the text always introduces his statement with a formula, such as "the LORD says," to make the antecedent clear.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the Qumran commentary on Habakkuk supports the MT reading over the LXX, and it is best to conclude that the MT represents the original reading.⁶⁶ It is also possible that the LXX reading has been misunderstood and that *ἐκ πίστεώς μου* should be read as an objective genitive ("faith in me").⁶⁷ To say

⁶²Debbie Hunn, "Habakkuk 2.4b in Its Context: How Far off Was Paul?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34 (Dec 2009): 219–39. Hunn identifies a fifth question: Does "by faith" (*בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ*) modify "righteous" (*צַדִּיק*) or does it modify "will live" (*יִחְיֶה*)? This question will not be addressed here.

⁶³O'Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 77–78; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 111–12; Heath Thomas, *Habakkuk, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 118; Rikki E. Watts, "For I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel": Romans 1:16–17 and Habakkuk 2:4," in *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Sven Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 13.

⁶⁴Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 211; Ward, *Habakkuk*, 14.

⁶⁵Hunn, "Habakkuk 2.4b in Its Context," 221.

⁶⁶William H. Brownlee, ed., *The Midrash Pesher of Habakkuk*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 24 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 126; Moisés Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 166. For additional support for the MT reading over the LXX and a review of the relevant literature see esp. Radu Gheorghita, *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews: An Investigation of Its Influence with Special Consideration to the Use of Hab 2:3–4 in Heb 10:37–38*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 160 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 148–79.

⁶⁷Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve*, 328. Shepherd points to a similar construction in Rev 2:13. Silva, citing Muraoka's lexicon, also lists this as a possibility (*NIDNTTE*, s.v. "πιστεύω," 3:763; *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, s.v. "πιστεύω," 559). However, it should be noted that both Silva and Muraoka point to an article by van Daalen for support, and an examination of van Daalen's article does not seem to support the contention that he saw an objective genitive in

that the vision is faithful/reliable is essentially another way of saying that God is faithful/reliable, so there is not a significant difference between the second and third options.⁶⁸ However, the second option suffers from the fact that the closest and most apparent referent for the pronoun is “the righteous” in 2:4b.⁶⁹ It is the צַדִּיק of “the righteous” that is in view, and the passage contrasts צַדִּיק with the pride of the Babylonians (2:4a).⁷⁰ Those who lack צַדִּיק, even if they are Israelites, will suffer the same eschatological fate as the wicked Babylonians.

What Is צַדִּיק?

As to the second question, the standard OT lexicon gives “trustworthiness” and “faithfulness” as the suggested English glosses for צַדִּיק in 2:4b, and it suggests “steadfastness” and “honesty” in other contexts.⁷¹ It is commonly agreed that the noun usually carries this passive sense (e.g., a “God of faithfulness,” Deut 32:4) and that the active sense of “faith,” “belief,” or “trust” is not its usual meaning in the OT. Therefore, the majority argue for the sense of “faithfulness” here in 2:4b.⁷² However, recognizing that the word is typically used for “faithfulness,” a minority argues for the sense of “faith” in the context

Hab 2:4. Van Daalen believes that πιστεύω μου in Hab 2:4 is a reference to God's faithfulness/trustworthiness. D. H. van Daalen, “The 'emunah / Πίστις of Habakkuk 2.4 and Romans 1.17,” in *Studia Evangelica, Vol. VII: Papers Presented to the Fifth International Congress on Biblical Studies Held at Oxford, 1973*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1982), 52–28.

⁶⁸For writers who combine these two options see, e.g., Haak, *Habakkuk*, 59; Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 609–10.

⁶⁹Hunn, “Habakkuk 2.4b in Its Context,” 224. Those who also arrive at this conclusion include Armerding, “Habakkuk,” 626; Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 60; Bruce, “Habakkuk,” 860–61; Clendenen, “Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness,” 509; Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 107; Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 472.

⁷⁰The “proud one” in 2:4a is best understood as the Babylonian who is described further in 2:5 and is the subject of the taunt in 2:6–20. See, e.g., Bailey, “Habakkuk,” 60; Rast, “Habakkuk and Justification by Faith,” 173.

⁷¹*HALOT*, s.v. “צַדִּיק,” 62. For similar conclusions see also *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “אֱמֵן,” 1:430; *TWOT*, s.v. “אֱמֵן,” 52.

⁷²See, e.g., Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 215; Armerding, “Habakkuk,” 625–26; Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 453; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Habakkuk 2:3–4 and the New Testament,” in *De La Tòrah Au Messie: Mélanges Henri Cazelles*, ed. Maurice Carrez, Joseph Doré, and Joseph Grelot (Paris: Desclée, 1981), 448; Haak, *Habakkuk*, 59; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 312; O'Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 78; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 111; Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 107; Smith, *Book of the Twelve*, 142; Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 472; Thomas, *Habakkuk*, 118–19. See also those below (n. 85) who argue for two senses in 2:4b, but see the passive sense as primary.

of 2:4b.⁷³

Several factors point to the sense of “faith” or “trust.”⁷⁴ First, as James Barr famously argued, there is no OT Hebrew word with a “noun form representing nominally the act indicated by the verb” אָמַן.⁷⁵ If 2:4b intentionally alludes to Genesis 15:6 with its foundational use of the verb אָמַן, then אֱמִינָה would have been the best way to describe an Abraham-like action in a noun form.⁷⁶ Second, the translation in the first century B.C. Qumran commentary on 2:4 (1QpHab 8:2–3) is best understood as “faith” and not “faithfulness.”⁷⁷ As Barr argued, “the presence of the preposition *b*, which is used [in the commentary] with the verb *he’min* ‘believe’” suggests that the commentary’s author understood Habakkuk to be referring to faith.⁷⁸ Third, the context of 2:4b supports the sense of “faith.” A lexical argument can be made to support both senses, and the context must determine the meaning intended in 2:4b.⁷⁹ The revelation that Habakkuk is receiving is trustworthy since it comes from God, but its fulfillment will be in the

⁷³Clendenen, “Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness”; Feinberg, *Minor Prophets*, 212; House, *Old Testament Theology*, 377; Hunn, “Habakkuk 2.4b in Its Context”; Debbie Hunn, “Pistis Christou in Galatians: The Connection to Habakkuk 2:4,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 63 (2012): 75–91; Kaiser, *Promise-Plan of God*, 196; Keil, “Habakkuk,” 402; Craig S. Keener, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 247; Pusey, *The Minor Prophets*, 192–93; James E. Smith, *The Minor Prophets* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1994), 452; Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve*, 327–28; Szeles, *Wrath and Mercy*, 32; von Orelli, *Twelve Minor Prophets*, 248; Whitehead, “Habakkuk and the Problem of Suffering,” 274. Although she uses the word “faithfulness,” Achtemeier defines “faithfulness” in 2:4b as “trust, dependence, clinging to God...placing one’s whole life in God’s hands and trusting him to fulfill it” (Achtemeier, *Nabum–Malachi*, 46). According to C. F. Keil, Jewish expositors “unanimously” understand this passage to be describing faith or reliance upon God (“Habakkuk,” in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996], 10:402).

⁷⁴These points are based on the study by Clendenen, “Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness,” 511–13.

⁷⁵James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 173. The verb אָמַן in the *Hiphil* stem clearly means “to believe” (*HALOT*, s.v. “אָמַן,” 64).

⁷⁶The connection between Hab 2:4 and Gen 15:6 is “impossible to mistake” (Keil, “Habakkuk,” 10:402).

⁷⁷See also Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 214; Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, 202; Brownlee, *Midrash Pesher*, 128; Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 120–21.

⁷⁸Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language*, 202. If Barr is correct about the preposition, the relevant passage would be translated as “because of their toil and their faith in the teacher” rather than “because of their toil and their faithfulness to the teacher.”

⁷⁹G. Michael O’Neal, *Interpreting Habakkuk as Scripture: An Application of the Canonical Approach of Brevard S. Childs*, *Studies in Biblical Literature* 9 (New York: Lang, 2007), 95. He points to Isa 7:9 which uses a wordplay based on the two senses of the word (166, n. 29). A wordplay only works when an audience understands a word to have two possible senses.

distant future (2:3), and it contains many elements challenging to believe. The "righteous" man is "one who waits for, that is, believes, the vision, or the God who gave the vision."⁸⁰ In this context, 2:4 is calling for a faith which is "simply an unwavering trust in God's word."⁸¹ As Oehler notes, this faith included both "a patience waiting and hoping for complete redemption."⁸² The remainder of the book (2:14; 3:13) calls for this faith, and Habakkuk himself demonstrates this faith in the concluding hymn (3:2, 16–19).⁸³ As this present study has attempted to show, God gives Habakkuk a message that, like the promise given to Abraham, calls Habakkuk (and his readers) to believe in God's trustworthiness despite apparent evidence to the contrary. The context of the whole book supports a translation of "faith" or "trust." The book calls for a "firm attachment to God, an undisturbed confidence in the divine promises of grace."⁸⁴

Some not wanting to draw a sharp distinction between faith and faithfulness have suggested that both are included in אֱמוּנָה, even if the passive sense is emphasized in 2:4b.⁸⁵ Achtemeier is correct when she argues, quoting from Spurgeon, that a "faith which saves is not one single act done and ended on a certain day: it is an act continued and persevered in throughout the entire life of man."⁸⁶ However, as Clendenen observes, although genuine faith is always coupled with obedience or faithfulness in Scripture, they remain distinct, and the distinction has significant ramifications.⁸⁷ Rather than assigning two different meanings to a single word in a single context, it seems best to conclude that Habakkuk 2:4b is speaking of faith. In the context of

⁸⁰Clendenen, "Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness," 511.

⁸¹Kaiser, *Promise-Plan of God*, 196.

⁸²Gustave Friedrich Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. George E. Day (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883), 460.

⁸³Clendenen, "Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness," 513. Michael Shepherd notes that in the OT "faith" is essentially synonymous with "fear" (יִרָא) which is Habakkuk's response in 3:2 (*The Text in the Middle*, Studies in Biblical Literature 162 [New York: Lang, 2014], 34).

⁸⁴Keil, "Habakkuk," 10:402.

⁸⁵Armerding, "Habakkuk," 626; Bellis, "Habakkuk 2:4b: Intertextuality and Hermeneutics," 374; Bruce, "Habakkuk," 860–61; David S. Dockery, "The Use of Hab 2:4 in Rom 1:17: Some Hermeneutical and Theological Considerations," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 22 (1987): 26; J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1874), 154–55; Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 201; Rast, "Habakkuk and Justification by Faith," 174; Moisés Silva, "Galatians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 802; George J. Zemek, "Interpretive Challenges Relating to Habakkuk 2:4b," *Grace Theological Journal* 1 (Spring 1980): 53.

⁸⁶Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi*, 46. Achtemeier is quoting Charles H. Spurgeon from "A Luther Sermon at the Tabernacle" delivered on Nov 11, 1883.

⁸⁷Clendenen, "Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness," 512.

Habakkuk, and arguably in the entire OT, faithfulness is already assumed to be present in those men who are called righteous. For example, in Genesis 15:6, Abraham is reckoned as righteous because he believed God's promise. Still, the subsequent narrative shows that Abraham demonstrated his faith in God through his obedience or faithfulness to God (see esp. Gen 22:1–18).⁸⁸ Therefore, it is not necessary to give אֱמֻנָה in 2:4b two meanings or to blur its semantical range to recognize the importance of faithfulness in those who are trusting in God.

Who Is the צַדִּיק?

The third question has been answered in several different ways. First, it could be a reference to those who keep, or strive to keep, the Law of Moses.⁸⁹ Second, some have argued that it is a forensic term referring to a legal standing before God as the judge.⁹⁰ Third, a minority of scholars have argued that the reference is a messianic title, i.e., “the Righteous One.”⁹¹ This last position finds support in the LXX which translates the phrase חַכְמָה לּוֹ in 2:3 (“wait for it” in NASB) as ὑπόμεινον αὐτόν (which could be translated as “wait for him”) and βέβαια ἔρχεται (which could be translated as “it will certainly come” in NASB) in 2:3 as ὅτι ἐρχόμενος ἤξει (which could be translated as “for when he comes he will come”), which could be understood as references to a person. However, the masculine references in the LXX could also be pointing back to either ὄρασις (“the vision”) or καιρόν (“the appointed time”), and thus be better translated as “it.”⁹²

Rather than being a messianic title, the “righteous” person is best

⁸⁸Later revelation will make it explicit that all those who had Abraham-like faith demonstrated it through faithfulness to God. See esp. Heb 11:1–40.

⁸⁹Armerding believes that it is in this context “a commitment to the demands of” תּוֹרָה. However, the allows for a broader application in pagan contexts (“Habakkuk,” 625).

⁹⁰See, e.g., Smith, *The Minor Prophets*, 452.

⁹¹See, e.g., Douglas A. Campbell, “Romans 1:17: A Crux Interpretum for the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (1994): 282; Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 119–42. Jewish literature up to the second century B.C. evidences both messianic and non-messianic readings of Hab 2:3–4 (Anthony T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 42–45; Thomas, *Habakkuk*, 116–17).

⁹²Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 162. The NETS translates both as “it.” The messianic title “Righteous One” likely was derived from Isa 53:10–11 and not from Hab 2:3–4 (Francis Watson, “By Faith (of Christ): An Exegetical Dilemma and Its Scriptural Solution,” in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009], 156).

understood as anyone "who conforms to the given norm."⁹³ In this case, the norm would have been the Mosaic Law.⁹⁴ However, because of human depravity, the Law was not a standard to which man could perfectly conform. OT believers were aware that they required an atonement greater than the atonement provided by the Mosaic system (Deut 32:43). Therefore, a decision between the first two options is not necessary. A "righteous" Israelite did strive to keep the Law, but, just as he did for Abraham, God considered them "righteous," i.e., as having met the standard, not based on their effort, but because they trusted him to save them.

Sailhamer has made a convincing argument that a central purpose of the Pentateuch was to demonstrate the Law's inability to save and the need for a righteousness that came with faith in God's promises.⁹⁵ Furthermore, according to Sailhamer, this purpose was demonstrated through the lives of the Pentateuch's two central characters: Abraham and Moses. Abraham "kept" God's commandments by trusting in God (Gen 26:5). Moses failed to "keep" God's Law because he did not believe God (Num 20:12) and thus did not enter the promised land. Therefore, if Sailhamer's conclusions are accepted, Habakkuk's message, of a righteous standing given to those who trust in God, built upon earlier revelation with the same message.

When Will the Righteous Live?

As to the fourth question, the "life" referred to by the verb חָיָה is best understood as everlasting life following resurrection. The verb in the *Qal* stem can mean (1) "to be alive," (2) "to live by something" (e.g., "to live by the sword," Gen 27:40), (3) "to revive, recover," and (4) "to return to life, revive."⁹⁶ This semantic range allows for three possible references in Habakkuk 2:4: (1) the preservation of life in the face of the coming judgment on Judah (which would fall into *HALOT*'s first definition),⁹⁷ (2) a quality of life (which could conceivably fit under *HALOT*'s second definition),⁹⁸ or (3) a resurrection to

⁹³Dockery, "The Use of Hab 2:4," 25.

⁹⁴Contra Hunn who argues that Hab 2:4b is speaking directly of Gentiles ("Habakkuk 2.4b in Its Context," 233–34).

⁹⁵John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 59–78.

⁹⁶*HALOT*, s.v. "חָיָה," 309.

⁹⁷See, e.g., Bellis, "Habakkuk 2:4b: Intertextuality and Hermeneutics," 373; Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets*, 189–90; von Orelli, *Twelve Minor Prophets*, 463.

⁹⁸See, e.g., Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 164–65; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 112; Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 107. *HALOT*'s second definition is the closest to the semantic range argued for by these writers. However, Hunn makes a convincing argument that חָיָה never refers to conduct or behavior, but instead refers to the preservation of physical life in a context such as Gen 27:40 and

eternal life (which would fall *HALOT*'s third or fourth definition).⁹⁹

Heath Thomas recently argues that this "life" in 2:4b cannot be a reference to eternal life in heaven because the context is the impending Babylonian invasion, and Habakkuk's contemporary Jeremiah promised that the people would survive the coming judgment and be restored from exile to their homeland (e.g., Jer 31:1–6).¹⁰⁰ However, it is not necessary to equate "eternal life" with life in heaven or rule out the possibility that the promised deliverance in Habakkuk (or Jeremiah) could not come through resurrection in the last days after the exile. Life in the coming messianic kingdom can also be described as "eternal life" (e.g., Dan 12:2). Other OT passages use the verb חיה to speak of Israel's corporate resurrection after the exile (e.g., Deut 32:39; Isa 26:19; Ezek 27:5–6). The resurrection of the believing remnant in the nation also entails the resurrection of individuals within that remnant. As already noted, Habakkuk confesses trust in God's promise to give life to the people of Israel (1:12). However, there is evidence in Habakkuk that he is referring to the eschatological return from exile as "life." Not only does the reference to God in 1:12 as a Rock point back to Deuteronomy 32:4, but as Patterson observes, three of the key words in Habakkuk 2:4 are found in this key text in Moses's song.¹⁰¹ Moses's song concludes a key OT passage (Deut 28–30) which speaks of Israel's future exile, repentance, and restoration, which is also the theme of the Twelve. In this Deuteronomistic context of exile and restoration through a new exodus, 2:4b speaks of eternal life graciously given to righteous individuals following the final resurrection (cf. Isa 26:19; 60:21; Hos 6:2; 13:14).¹⁰²

Paul's Use of Habakkuk 2:4

Many commentators conclude that Paul's use of Habakkuk 2:4 does not match its original meaning.¹⁰³ All of the four questions

Deut 8:3 ("Habakkuk 2.4b in Its Context," 228–30).

⁹⁹See, e.g., Clendenen, "Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness," 509; Feinberg, *Minor Prophets*, 212–13; Hunn, "Habakkuk 2.4b in Its Context," 229–32; Pusey, *The Minor Prophets*, 192–93; Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 178–79. Some argue that the reference has both a temporal/immediate and an eternal significance (see, e.g., Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 60; Smith, *The Minor Prophets*, 452).

¹⁰⁰Thomas, *Habakkuk*, 119–20.

¹⁰¹I.e., צדיק, נאמן, and ישר (Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 200). Bellis also makes a connection between the "faith" in Hab 2:4b and the faithlessness of the collective people of Israel in Deut 32:20 (Bellis, "Habakkuk 2:4b: Intertextuality and Hermeneutics," 373).

¹⁰²See, e.g., Clendenen, "Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness," 509; Hunn, "Habakkuk 2.4b in Its Context," 229–31. The connection between "eternal life" and the messianic kingdom is evident in later Judaism at the time of Christ's ministry (e.g., Matt 19:16, 23, 29; 25:46; Luke 10:25).

¹⁰³On both Pauline passages see, e.g., Watson, "By Faith," 162. On Rom 1:17

addressed in the previous section impact the conclusion one reaches on this question. In Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, the context indicates that Paul refers to "faith" and not "faithfulness."¹⁰⁴ Some have argued that Paul's use is consistent with Habakkuk's original meaning.¹⁰⁵ At the very least, some argue, Paul "has preserved Habakkuk's emphasis on faith in God's eventual response to the plight of his people, but by tying the term faith specifically to the gospel he has given Habakkuk's phrase a specificity that it did not have in its original context."¹⁰⁶

Before considering Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, it should be noted that Paul also quotes from Habakkuk 1:5 when preaching in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:41). Paul warns his Jewish audience not to be like their ancestors who disbelieved Habakkuk's message. By citing this key verse in Habakkuk containing the verb *ἰδὼν*, Paul indicates that his gospel preaching did not rely on proof-texting (i.e., removing Hab 2:4 from its original context) but was instead based on the original message of the entire book of Habakkuk.¹⁰⁷ Paul's gospel message has continuity with Habakkuk's eschatological message, and those who disbelieve are "scoffers" or are those who "perish." Conversely, those who believe Paul's message are, just like those who believed Habakkuk's message, "freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses" (Acts 13:39).

Additionally, a persuasive case can be made that, before Paul began preaching, Jesus's frequent expression *ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε* ("your faith has saved you," Mark 5:34 par. Matt 9:22; Mark 10:52 par. Luke 18:42; Luke 7:50; 17:19) was based on Habakkuk.¹⁰⁸ Like the saying

see, e.g., Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 32; Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 185–86. On Gal 3:11 see, e.g., Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 147; Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 166; Martyn, *Galatians*, 312; Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 206–7. Moo believes that Paul's use of Hab 2:4 in Gal 3:11 "exhibits that 'deepening' of the original sense that is a hallmark of the NT use of the OT.... The biggest difference between Habakkuk and Paul seems to lie in the use of the verb, 'live.'"

¹⁰⁴Seifrid, "Romans," 609.

¹⁰⁵Clendenen, "Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness"; Hunn, "Habakkuk 2.4b in Its Context"; Hunn, "Pistis Christou in Galatians"; Maureen W. Yeung, *Faith in Jesus and Paul: A Comparison with Special Reference to "Faith That Can Remove Mountains" and "Your Faith Has Healed/Saved You,"* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 147 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 199.

¹⁰⁶Frank Thielman, *Paul & the Law* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 129.

¹⁰⁷Yeung, *Faith in Jesus and Paul*, 200.

¹⁰⁸The following argument is based on that of Yeung, *Faith in Jesus and Paul*, 216.

in Habakkuk 2:4, Jesus's expression speaks of faith as confidence placed in God. Habakkuk 2:4's promise of "life" can be equated with Jesus's "saved," and there is evidence from Jewish intertestamental literature that Habakkuk's "life" had already been equated with "salvation" by the time Jesus began to preach.¹⁰⁹ This connection finds support from the book of Habakkuk itself which in 3:13 speaks of God marching forth in the end times "for the salvation of [his] people" (לְיִשְׁעַ עַמּוֹ; cf. εἰς σωτηρίαν λαοῦ σου, LXX) and for "the salvation of [his] anointed" (לְיִשְׁעַ מְשִׁיחִי; cf. τοῦ σῶσαι τοὺς χριστούς σου, LXX), and in 3:18 rejoices "in the God of my salvation" (יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעִי; cf. ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτηρῇ μου, LXX). Habakkuk desired to see God save (יִשַׁע; 1:3), he received a revelation that encouraged his continued trust that God would bring salvation in the end times, and Paul knew that this eschatological salvation would come through One whose name meant "YHWH saves" (יְהוָה שׁוּעַ).

Therefore, Paul in both Romans 1 and Galatians 3 uses Habakkuk 2:4b in a manner consistent with its original meaning. He may have omitted the personal pronoun μου to make the original meaning of the Hebrew text clear.¹¹⁰ Still, he is not guilty of proof-texting or making an application that is not consistent with God's original saying to Habakkuk. Those who are trusting in God's eschatological deliverance carried out through his Messiah are considered righteous. The Judge considers them to have met the standard required by his Law. They are forgiven of their sins and will be resurrected to enter the Messiah's everlasting kingdom.

The Use of Habakkuk 2:4 in Hebrews 10:38

The author of the book of Hebrews (AH) also uses Habakkuk 2:4 in a manner consistent with its original context. His application is different from that of Paul, but he does not change the OT passage's meaning to suit his needs. As we have already discussed above, genuine faith in God is always accompanied by faithfulness to God. True faith is demonstrated in actions and affections, which is the subject of the familiar passage in Hebrews 11, and the concept behind the AH's quotation of Habakkuk. Much has been made of the modifications that the AH makes to the LXX text in his quotation and the fact that he

¹⁰⁹"For Paul, as for many other Jews, 'life' (especially eternal life) and 'salvation' were practically synonymous. If Paul's self-designation as a 'Hebrew born of Hebrews' (Phil. 3:5) means (as is probable) that he was the Aramaic-speaking child of Aramaic-speaking parents, he would very likely, when speaking his native tongue, employ the same word...for both 'life' and 'salvation'" (F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 2nd ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 76).

¹¹⁰Hunn, "Habakkuk 2.4b in Its Context," 224. Silva also acknowledges this as a likely possibility ("Galatians," 801).

clearly understands the OT passage eschatologically.¹¹¹ Since we have already concluded that the MT text of Habakkuk 2:3–4 is preferred, it seems best to conclude here that the AH believes that the LXX is faithful to the meaning of the original, even if the LXX's translation is interpretative.¹¹² In light of the Messiah's eschatological coming to judge the wicked and save the righteous, the AH calls on his readers to persevere in faith, which inevitably leads to faithfulness. By continuing to trust in Christ, the readers can avoid being destroyed along with the wicked.

Conclusion: What Do We Learn from Habakkuk?

Habakkuk presents God as the king of the world that he has made. "Punishment derives from a struggle against God's reign, and restoration remains the ultimate result of all Yahweh's efforts."¹¹³ Even "God's raising up the Chaldeans showed that he is sovereign over the whole earth. He is not confined to one nation or one people (cf. Amos 9:7)."¹¹⁴ The Babylonians that were coming in Habakkuk's day picture an even greater eschatological enemy of Israel, but just as he did with Pharaoh at the first Exodus (cf. Rom 9:17), God can, in order to display his glory, both raise up and tear down this future ruler in the eschatological new exodus.

Habakkuk also presents God as the world's judge. Wendland identifies the following four central principles of divine justice in Habakkuk:

- (i) God's judgment upon the proud and wicked of this world will inevitably be carried out in just accordance with his perfect holiness (2:2–5; 3:3–7); (ii) the faith of the righteous people of God will be ultimately vindicated when earth's oppressors are punished once and for all (2:6–19; 3:8–15); (iii) the Holy Sovereign LORD (Yahweh) is also a merciful God, who will finally deliver all those who put their trust in him, if not in this life, then most certainly in the life to come (2:4b; 3:2b, 13a); (iv) the "righteous believer" is one who lives his/her faith

¹¹¹See esp. Fitzmyer, "Habakkuk 2:3–4 and the New Testament," 453–54. For those who see the LXX interpreting Hab 2:3 as a reference to the Messiah see, e.g., C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1953), 51; Gheorghita, *Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews*, 188–218; Hanson, *Technique and Theology*, 42; Desta Heliso, *Pistis and the Righteous One: A Study of Romans 1:17 against the Background of Scripture and Second Temple Jewish Literature*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 235 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 42–46; Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve*, 325.

¹¹²"Our author, then, is but dotting the i's and crossing the t's of the Septuagint interpretation when he applies Hab. 2:3b to the second coming of Christ" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 273, emphasis added).

¹¹³House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, 146–47.

¹¹⁴Bailey, "Habakkuk," 305.

in joyful, confident and reverent expectation that the future is secure in a living, loving God who cares, in keeping with his eternal covenant promises (2:4b, 14, 20; 3:2, 16–19).¹¹⁵

Habakkuk never questions that the nation is deserving of God's wrath, but he also takes solace in knowing that the Judge is also merciful (3:2). The same God who can kill is also able to make the righteous live (Deut 32:39). Though God is just in allowing his people to pass through indiscriminate trials during this life, he will discriminate in their favor in the end. Habakkuk does not explicitly mention the salvation of Gentiles. Still, his message of God's sovereignty and justice is consistent with those prophets who do speak of the nations streaming to Jerusalem to worship God in the day when the "proud look of man will be abased and the loftiness of man will be humbled" (Isa 2:11).

Habakkuk, in line with the Pentateuch, presents the people of Israel in need of a Savior. In a section of Scripture often evoked by Habakkuk, Moses predicted that Israel would be "a perverse generation, Sons in whom is no faithfulness" (Deut 32:20). This indictment was still right in Habakkuk's day (Hab 1:5), and Jesus would frequently use "this generation" language drawn from Deuteronomy to speak of the unbelief in Israel during his day (e.g., Matt 11:16; 12:41–42; 23:36, etc.). What was required then and now is a new birth, what Habakkuk would have known from Deuteronomy 30 as "circumcision of the heart." This impartation of a new nature would enable faith in God's promises and inevitably lead to the faithfulness that accompanies genuine faith.

Israel's new birth would not occur until the future Day of the Lord, but that Day would also involve darkness, judgment for the nation of Israel (5:18). A great eschatological enemy will confront Israel, one that has some continuity with Babylon (cf. Isa 14:1–23),¹¹⁶ and Habakkuk emphasizes the darkness of the Day and the coming enemy in both 2:6–20 and 3:3–15. To see this Day made him tremble (3:16). He does not know when this judgment will reach its darkness point, but regardless of how it affects him personally, he will continue to trust that God will deliver him (3:16–18). In this way, his faith is like that of all the righteous, Israelites and Gentiles, who have been warned of difficulties and tribulations in this life but have been promised eschatological life on account of the Messiah's work. Therefore, the NT writers use Habakkuk's words consistent with their original meaning. Like Isaiah (Isa 8:16–18) and Daniel (Dan 12:13), Habakkuk is a model to all of us who are "waiting on the future work of God whether or not it appears" in our lifetime.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵Wendland, "The Righteous Live by Their Faith' in a Holy God," 611–12.

¹¹⁶For a recent defense of the referent of Isa 14:4–21 being an eschatological enemy of Israel see esp. Timothy Allen Little, *Israel's Eschatological Enemy: The Identity of King of Babylon in Isaiah 14:4–21* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020).

¹¹⁷Shepherd, *Text in the Middle*, 33.